

## Aztec, Maya and More!

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### **Teacher note:**

Please make photocopies of the *Stories in Stone (Stela Activity Sheet)* for each student and bring them to your distance learning lab, along with pencils.

## **Teacher Information Guide**

Distance Learning at the Cleveland Museum of Art

### **Aztec, Maya, and More!**

*Grades 3 - 6*

#### **Program Objectives:**

1. Through artifacts in the CMA's collection, students will be introduced to aspects of the daily life and rituals of ancient Mesoamerican and South American cultures.
2. Students will learn the meaning of the term *Pre-Columbian*, and discover where and how Pre-Columbian art was made.
3. Students will learn how to decipher an ancient Mayan glyph during an in-lesson activity.

#### **National Education Standards:**

*For Fine Arts - Visual Arts (grades K-4, 5-8):*

- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.
- Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines.
- Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

*For Language Arts - English (grades K-12):*

- Evaluation Strategies
- Communication Strategies
- Applying Knowledge
- Multicultural Understanding

*For Social Sciences - Geography (grades K-12):*

- The World in Spatial Terms
- Places and Regions
- Human Systems
- Environment and Society

*For Social Sciences – U.S. History (grades K-4):*

- Living and Working Together in Families and Communities, Now and Long Ago
- The History of Peoples of Many Cultures Around the World

*For Social Sciences – World History (grades 5-12):*

- Era 2: Early Civilizations and the Emergence of Pastoral Peoples, 4000-1000 BCE
- Era 3: Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires 1000 BCE-300 CE
- Era 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300-1000 CE
- Era 5: Intensified Hemispheric Interactions, 1000-1500 CE

## **Selected Vocabulary:**

**Pre-Columbian** - belonging to, or representing the period of time before the arrival of Columbus in America.

**Mesoamerica** – A geographic and cultural area of Central America reaching from northern Mexico to the Isthmus of Panama.

**Olmec** – Ancient American people who are believed to be earliest inhabitants of Mesoamerica. They lived along the Gulf coast (in the areas today known as Veracruz and Tabasco.) Their civilization existed during the Pre-Classic period from approximately 1500 – 400 BC.

**Maya** – Ancient American people of Central America whose highly developed civilization originated during the Pre-Classic period (c. 2000 BC – 250 AD) and reached its height during the Classic period (c. 250 - 900 AD). Some of their cities continued through the Post Classic period until the arrival of the Spanish in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Aztec** – Ancient American people who ruled a large empire in (what is now) Central Mexico from 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, before its conquest by the Spaniards in 1521. Many of the ethnic groups of Aztec people spoke the Nahuatl language.

**Glyph** – A symbol used to represent a name, word, or message.

**Stela** (stelae, pl.) – A free-standing stone slab, carved on one or more faces.

**Labret** – An ornament worn through a hole pierced in the lip.

**Quetzal** – A Central American bird with brilliant golden-green and red feathers.

## **Teaching Extensions:**

### *Visual Arts*

1. Masks were made by many ancient American cultures, including the Maya and the Aztecs. Some masks were worn only on special occasions, some had special religious meaning, some were created as offerings for the gods, or for covering the face after death. Masks were made of jade, turquoise, precious stones, gold, shell pieces, and other natural materials.

Using tagboard or heavy paper, make a life-sized mask. Decorate it with cut out construction paper, markers, pipe cleaners, feathers, and bits of gold or silver foil. Remember that the Pre-Columbian cultures liked to wear face and ear jewelry, headdresses, feathers and face

tattooing or painting. You may want to refer to the enclosed color image of the Nayarit figures for reference.

**Materials needed:** cardstock or tagboard, scissors, glue, colored construction paper, color markers, feathers, gold and silver foil.

### *Language Arts*

2. Throughout history, people have tried to find a way to record their thoughts, stories, histories and important numbers. In many places in the world different cultures have devised a code or alphabet in order to write these things down. As an individual or group project, have the students research the origins of writing throughout the world. Include the following: who the people were, where they were living, the approximate dates of their civilization, how their writing codes looked, etc. You may want to show the students before they begin their project a few examples of writing systems such as Egyptian hieroglyphs, Maya emblem glyphs (enclosed), or cuneiform.

**Materials needed:** Maya glyph worksheets (attached), plus other reference materials. The following are books you may want to consult on writing:

Clairborne, Robert. *The Birth of Writing*. New York: Time-life Books, 1974.

Roaf, Michael. *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East*. New York: Facts on File, 1990.

Viola, Herman J. and Margolis, Carolyn. *Seeds of Change*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

Walker, C. B. *Reading the Past: Cuneiform*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

### *Social Sciences*

3. Divide students into groups and assign each group one of the enclosed color images from the distance learning lesson. Students can develop and research a topic related to each image, such as: *Daily Life (Male and Female Figures)*; *Warriors and Weapons*, or *Aztecs vs. Cortés (Warrior Figure)*; *Gods and Rulers, (Stela relief)*; *Animals of the Americas*, or “*What would I Wear in Ancient America?*” (*tunic*). Oral reports could be made to the class, or presentations could be created with computer software such as Hyper Studio or Power Point.  
**Option:** Research groups could devise a simple five question quiz to give to the class after their report based on the material they present. This can serve as a check for comprehension or an evaluation tool.
4. Create a timeline for the ancient American cultures discussed in this lesson:

*Central America (Mexico) Nayarit: 100BC – 500 AD, Maya Classic Period: 200-900 AD, Aztec: 1325-1519 AD*  
*South America (Peru) Nazca: 200 BC – 100 AD, Ocucaje(a Paracas culture): 600-175BC*  
If desired, add in dates for other American cultures (such as Olmec, Toltec, Inca, Pueblo, Hopewell, etc.) and explorers of the New World.

**Materials needed:** roll paper, pencils, markers, rulers, optional illustrations.

## **Suggested Reading:**

*For students...*

- Baquadano, Elizabeth. *Eyewitness Books: Aztec, Inca and Maya*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993.
- Defrates, Joanna. *What do we Know about the Aztecs?* New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1992.
- Greene, Jacqueline D. *The Maya*. New York: Franklin Watts, A First Book, 1992. (Grades 3-7)
- Hicks, Peter. *The Aztecs*. New York: Thomson Learning, 1993. (Grades 4-7)
- Hull, Robert. *Pre-Columbian Stories*. New York: Thomson Learning, 1994. (Grades 1-6)
- Janson, Thor. *In the Land of Green Lightening: The World of the Maya*. San Francisco, Ca.: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994.
- Latimore, Deborah Nouse. *Why There is no Arguing in Heaven: A Mayan Myth* (n.p.), 1989.
- McKissack, Pal. *Aztec Indians*. Chicago: Children's Press, 1985. (Grades K-3)
- Newman, Shirley. *The Incas*. New York: Franklin Watts, A First Book, 1992. (Grades 3-7)
- Odiijk, Pamela. *The Aztecs*. South Melbourne, Australia: McMillan, 1989. (Grades 4-8)
- The Mayas*. South Melbourne, Australia: McMillan, 1989. (Grades 4-8)
- Shepherd, Donna Walsh. *The Maya*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1992. (Grades 3-7)
- Steele, Philip. *The Aztec News: The Greatest Newspaper in Civilization*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 1997.
- Wood, Tim. *The Aztecs (See-Through History)*. New York: Viking Books, 1992.

*For teachers...*

- Coe, Michael, Dean Snow and Elizabeth Benson. *Atlas of Ancient America*. New York: Facts on File, 1986. (Adult text, maps and photos for all ages)

## **Websites of Interest:**

- *Maya Adventure*: highlights science activities and information related to ancient and modern Maya culture. [www.sci.mus.mn.us/sln/ma/top.html](http://www.sci.mus.mn.us/sln/ma/top.html)

- *Mayan Kids*: interactive website with information on Mayan people, places, beliefs, and games to play online. <http://www.mayankids.com/index.html>
  - *Adding Mayan Numbers*, websites regarding Maya math  
<http://www.mayacalendar.com/mayacalendar/f-mayamath.html>
  - [www.museumofman.org/sites/default/files/previsit\\_maya.pdf](http://www.museumofman.org/sites/default/files/previsit_maya.pdf)
- *The Aztec Empire*: a Library Thinkquest website designed by students  
<http://library.thinkquest.org/16325/y-main.html>
- *The Aztec Calendar*: displays today's date according to Aztec graphics and calculations  
<http://www.azteccalendar.com/azteccalendar.html>

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## Writing About Art

Learning to write about art is a helpful tool in understanding it. Once the observer knows what to look for in a piece of artwork, it becomes easier to both write about and understand the work. Listed below is a guideline that will help you.

### **Questions to ask yourself as you write:**

1. *What do you see? What is this picture about?*  
People  
Objects  
Scene – time and place  
Action – what is going on?
2. *How is the work made --what materials, tools, or process is used? What elements has the artist manipulated? The following list may be helpful.*  
Oil, watercolor, pastel, ink, clay  
Palette knife, brush, pen, chalk, etching, screen printing  
Color, light, line, shape, space
3. *How does the work make you feel?*  
Happy, sad, anxious, angry, nostalgic, adventurous  
Are the brushstrokes rough or smooth, or are they evident at all? Are the colors hot or cool  
Is the subject matter active or quiet? Are the lines flowing, irregular or discontinuous?

In addition to analyzing the work, it is also important to do a little research about the artist such as when and where the artist lived. What were some of the things the artist was concerned about and how is this apparent in his or her work? Were there things in the artist's life that inspired him or her? In short:

4. *What can you learn about the artist?*  
What country is the artist from?  
What can you find out about his or her experiences?  
What ideas or feelings is the artist suggesting?

Finally, play the role of the art critic. Art criticism is based on a number of things. Think, for example, about the style the artist is using. You may want to consider the following approaches the artist may have taken:

*Realism:* The artist accurately describes the subject matter – the art looks real.

*Formalism:* The artist has experimented with shape, color, and space in an unusual way.

Now put it all together! You decide - has the artist succeeded in doing what you think he or she tried to do?

## Selected Images



*Male and Female Figures*, Mexico, Nayarit, 1<sup>st</sup> C. BC-4<sup>th</sup> C. AD. CMA 1998.83.1



*Figure of a Warrior*, Mexico, Aztec, c. 1350-1519 AD. CMA 1984.37





*Front Face of a Stela (Free-standing stone with relief),*  
Mexico, Maya c. 692 AD. CMA 1967.29



*Seated Figure, Mexico, Olmec, 1200-300 BC, c. 900-300 BC, 1941.390*

Teaching Extension: Maya Glyphs



CREATE YOUR OWN MAYA GLYPHS



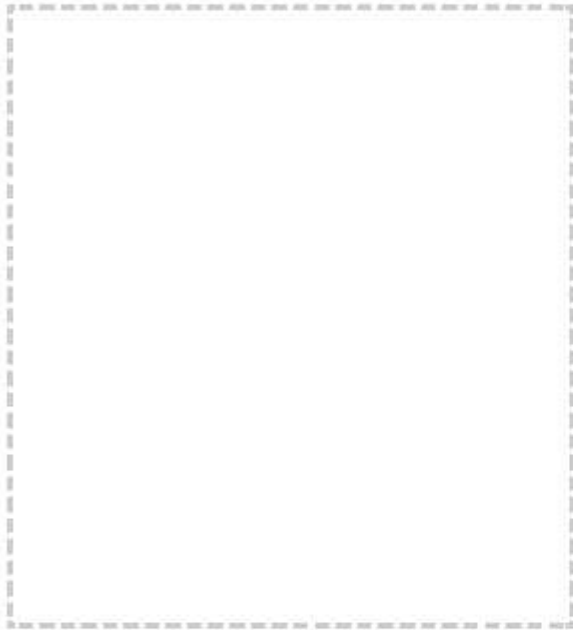
**Lady**



Draw a design or picture to  
represent your name on this side



## CREATE YOUR OWN MAYA GLYPHS



Draw a design or picture to  
represent your name on this side



**Lord**

The Cleveland Museum of Art, 2002



## EXAMPLES OF MAYAN GLYPHS



The Maya used glyphs (pictures or symbols) to communicate names, words, messages or ideas. Glyphs were carved into stone for monuments and buildings, painted on pottery, drawn on walls, and in special books made of bark called codices. Just four Mayan codices

exist today. Only the wealthy and powerful in Mayan society could read or write glyphs. Can you think of other cultures who communicated through pictures? Try making up a picture language of your own to share with friends!



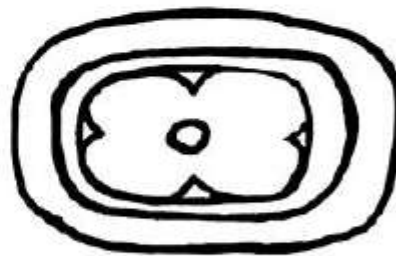
Sij  
Birth



Ya-xun b'alam  
Bird Jaguar (the name of a ruler)



Na or ixik  
Lady \_\_\_\_\_



K'in  
The Sun



uh  
The Moon



kab  
The Earth



### STORIES IN STONE REVEALED!



This large, standing stone sculpture or **stela** shows a portrait of the royal Maya lady *Na Kan Ajaw* (pronounced NAAH CON AH-HOW) wearing the costume of the maize god. At her side is a richly dressed dwarf. Blocks of hieroglyphic writing tell us their names, the reason the stela was carved, and even the names of the artists who did the work!

Try your hand at deciphering and draw a line from the objects on the left to their location on the stela.



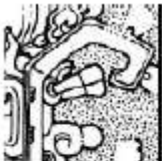
**EARFLARE**



**JAGUAR  
TAIL**



**XOK  
MONSTER**



**SCEPTER**



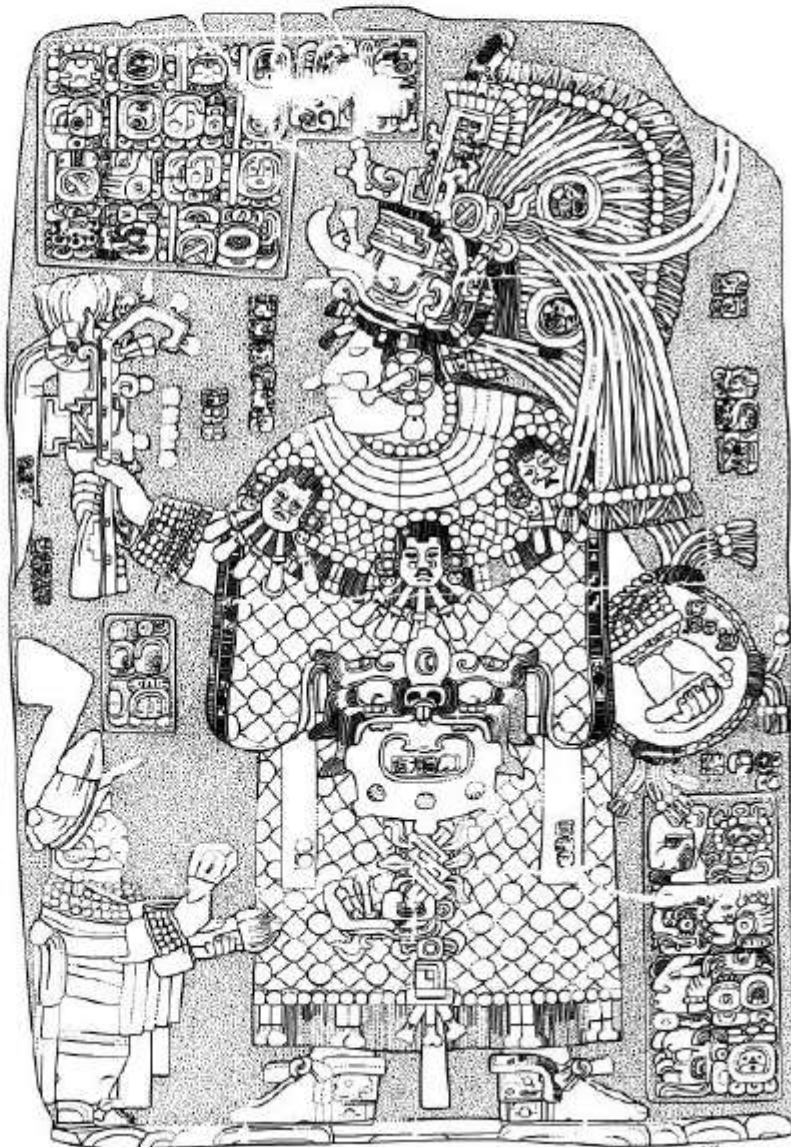
**NA KAN  
AJAW  
GLYPH**  
(lady's name)



**PORTRAIT  
HEAD**



**QUETZAL  
FEATHERS  
WITH  
BEADS**



©1998 J. MONTEFIORE  
The Cleveland Museum of Art, 2003





## STORIES IN STONE REVEALED!



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